



Rocky Hill Public Schools Superintendent Search

Stakeholder Feedback Report and Leader Profile August 2026

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Introduction

Dr. Charles Dumais and Mr. David Erwin, Search Consultants for Cooperative Educational Services, of Trumbull, CT, met with the Rocky Hill Board of Education to establish parameters for the collection of stakeholder feedback for the purpose of identifying current district educational strengths and challenges and the desired skills, qualities, and attributes for the next superintendent of Rocky Hill Public Schools.

Stakeholder feedback, in the form of electronic surveys, focus groups, and structured Board of Education input, was synthesized to develop a comprehensive and representative set of leadership roles and leadership competencies to be assessed in the selection of the ideal candidate. This synthesis draws on a research-based library of executive leadership qualities developed over more than forty years of applied competency and motivation research, ensuring that the profile that follows reflects both the specific voice of the Rocky Hill community and a proven, standards-based framework for evaluating superintendent leadership.

This report provides summary information about the data collection process, the perceived educational strengths and challenges of the district, the qualities desired in the next district leader, and the key skills and experiences essential for the ideal candidate. The roles and competencies developed from this information will serve as the foundation for the standards-based selection of candidates to be considered and, ultimately, of the candidate to be recommended for appointment. It will also serve as a resource to the superintendent and the Board of Education as they transition into their new working relationship.

The Rocky Hill Board of Education is grateful to the broad and diverse group of stakeholders from the Rocky Hill community and Rocky Hill Public Schools who gave their time and candor to this important process.

The Rocky Hill Board of Education has reviewed and approved the content of this report [September 11, 2026].

Stakeholder Feedback Collection

Over the course of the summer of 2026, stakeholder feedback was collected through two electronic surveys, seven focus groups, and structured written input from the Board of Education. The methodology was intentionally inclusive, drawing insight from

constituents in different formats and at different points in the process so that no single voice or format would define the profile of the district's next leader. Feedback from every source was reviewed, coded thematically, correlated with a comprehensive research-based library of leadership roles and competencies, and reviewed a second time for accuracy and completeness. Through this process, a deep and balanced understanding of the district's current landscape, immediate priorities, and future potential has emerged.

Participant Demographics

More than one hundred and eighty stakeholder touchpoints informed this report. Ninety-three individuals completed one of two electronic surveys distributed to the community. Respondents identified primarily as parents of Rocky Hill Public Schools students, followed by certified staff, students, non-certified staff, and a smaller number of town officials, residents without school-age children, and other community members. Eighty-five additional stakeholders took part in one of seven focus group sessions (virtual and in-person), including groups made up of parents, town officials, the administrators' union, central office leadership, central office staff, certified staff, and non-certified staff. Members of the Board of Education also completed a detailed written evaluation of district strengths, district challenges, near-term imperatives, success measures, values, financial acumen, stakeholder fit, preferred candidate experience, and preferred candidate credentials.

Survey

Two electronic surveys were distributed to stakeholders through direct email and a conspicuous link on the district website over the course of the summer. Combined, the surveys drew ninety-three responses, with a noticeably heavier response from certified staff and students on the first survey and from parents on the second. All participants had the opportunity to rate predefined, research-based leadership qualities and areas of expertise in order of importance, to indicate the leadership experiences they believe the next superintendent should hold, and to respond to open-ended prompts about district strengths, district challenges, and any other success factors they view as essential.

Focus Groups and Key Individual Interviews

Eighty-five stakeholders took part in seven separate focus group sessions convened to gather perspective on the superintendent search. These included a group of eight parents, thirteen town officials, twelve members of the Administrators' Union, three members of Central Office leadership, eight members of Central Office staff, and forty certified staff members, the largest single group to participate in the process. A single non-certified staff member also met individually with the search consultant. Each group was asked to reflect on district strengths and challenges, the leadership experiences most important for the next superintendent, qualities that would contribute to the next superintendent's success, and factors that would undermine that success.

Board of Education

The Board of Education provided in-depth, individualized written feedback on district challenges, district imperatives, detailed measures of success for the next superintendent over the first six, twelve, and eighteen months, the values and beliefs the next superintendent should hold, the financial acumen the role requires, the specific stakeholder groups the superintendent must build relationships with and how, and the desired experience, credentials, and other qualifications of the ideal candidate. The Board's structured input carries particular weight in this report and has been weighted accordingly in the synthesis of stakeholder feedback.

Strengths

Stakeholders across every group described Rocky Hill Public Schools as a district with a strong foundation to build upon. The most frequently cited strength, by a wide margin, was the quality and dedication of the teaching staff. Parents and staff alike described teachers who are, in the words of one parent, "dedicated individuals who truly care about each student's growth," and certified staff pointed with pride to a district where, as one respondent put it, teachers are "treated as professionals and given some autonomy in the classroom, so long as they meet the district's high expectations." Central Office leadership echoed this sentiment, citing "super teacher and staff" among the district's greatest assets, and the Administrators' Union pointed to "out of the box

programs" and "great kids" as evidence of a school community that performs well above what its resources alone would predict.

Academic performance and rigor emerged as a second consistent theme. Respondents pointed to strong state assessment results, a "distinguished record of improving student performance," and a curriculum that, as one parent described it, provides "short-term and long-term opportunity to all of our students." Several stakeholders noted that Rocky Hill's academic reputation has been a draw for new families, with one community respondent observing that the district is "one of the few school districts in Connecticut that is actually growing in student population" over the past fifteen years, a pattern that town officials confirmed when they cited "academic achievement of students" among the district's most significant strengths.

Community pride and engagement rounded out the strengths most often named. Central Office leadership specifically noted that the "Board celebrates at every meeting" and that Rocky Hill is a "diverse, socioeconomic, cultural, very rich community" where the arts are valued as highly as athletics. Parents and staff described a district with strong family support, active community partnerships, and, in the words of one respondent, a "great community with a lot of interconnections." Town officials pointed to the district's collaborative relationships with municipal departments and its school resource officer program as evidence of productive partnership between the schools and the town. Several stakeholders also highlighted the strength of the district's special education programming and its record of inclusion, with one community respondent citing a specific specialized program as a point of pride.

Challenges

Despite these strengths, stakeholders across nearly every group candidly identified the relationship between Central Office and the rest of the district as the most pressing challenge facing Rocky Hill Public Schools. Certified staff, the largest single group to weigh in through both the survey and the focus group process, described the current administrative structure as "top-heavy" and pointed to a recent staff climate survey in which, they said, a majority of teachers indicated they were hesitant to speak openly with Central Office leadership for fear of retaliation. Several survey respondents

referenced a perceived lack of transparency in recent Central Office hiring, with more than one respondent specifically citing the addition of assistant superintendent positions without postings or interviews as a source of frustration and distrust. It is important to note that Central Office staff themselves were not immune to this concern. Their own focus group named accountability, courage, and follow-through among the qualities they most want to see in the next superintendent, and their own list of potential derailers included "yes to everyone, people-pleaser" and "more concerned with looking good than doing right by staff and students." Taken together, this feedback points less to a single group's grievance than to a shared, district-wide desire to rebuild trust, clarify roles, and restore confidence in how decisions are made and communicated at every level of the organization.

Financial constraints and facility needs were the second most frequently cited challenge. Stakeholders described a district managing a "tight" budget in a town that, as one board member put it, "must be conservative" given its size, and pointed specifically to aging infrastructure, an underfunded capital improvement plan, and the need for building upkeep, including roof repairs, as pressing near-term needs. Several respondents also cited declining enrollment in some grade levels alongside rising special education costs as a financial pressure the next superintendent will need to navigate carefully.

Changing student demographics and the resources needed to support them emerged as a third significant theme. Respondents across staff and administrative groups pointed to a growing multilingual learner population, an increasing degree of need among students receiving special education services, and a rise in behavioral and social emotional challenges in classrooms as areas requiring additional staffing, training, and support. Stakeholders offered differing views on how the district should approach questions of diversity, equity, and inclusion specifically. Several respondents, including members of the Board of Education, described a continued commitment to equity, inclusion, and culturally responsive practice as essential to serving Rocky Hill's increasingly diverse student population. Others expressed concern that an overemphasis on these initiatives could be divisive and urged the next superintendent to focus first and foremost on academic outcomes and a sense of shared community. This report presents

both perspectives as genuine and sincerely held views within the Rocky Hill community, offered here so the Board and the next superintendent can navigate this topic thoughtfully and inclusively.

Communication, both within the district and between Central Office and the broader community, was the final challenge raised consistently across every stakeholder group. Certified staff described "too many new initiatives" introduced without adequate time to implement them well, and several respondents pointed to inconsistent policies and expectations from one school building to the next. Parents and community members asked for more frequent, direct communication from district leadership, particularly around schedule changes and emergency decisions, with one survey respondent noting that families "rarely hear from the Superintendent of schools about anything" beyond routine email updates. Facility conditions, curriculum currency, particularly in middle school mathematics, and the pace of change introduced over the past several years were also named repeatedly as areas the next superintendent will need to approach with patience, clarity, and a well-communicated plan.

Superintendent Performance Criteria

Key Leadership Roles

Communicator emerged as the single most essential leadership role across every stakeholder group and every method of feedback collection, including the Board of Education. The ability to provide timely, honest, and appropriately tailored information to a wide range of audiences was named again and again as the foundation for everything else the next superintendent must accomplish. Board members described the need for a superintendent who "communicates openly, honestly, and proactively" and who "shares both successes and challenges, providing timely information that enables informed decision-making." Certified staff sought "two-way communication, timely, transparent," while Central Office staff specifically named "strong communication with town leadership" as an essential quality. Nearly every focus group's list of potential derailers included some version of "not communicating," underscoring how central this role is to trust and stability across the district.

Relationship Builder was identified as a close second priority, particularly given the trust that stakeholders described needing to be rebuilt across the organization. "Accessible, approachable, and visible within the schools and community" was among the most highly rated personal qualities in the combined survey data, and the Board described its ideal candidate in nearly identical terms, as someone who "builds trust with families, community members, and municipal leaders through visibility, accessibility, and effective communication" and who is "compassionate, respected, trusted, empathetic." Certified staff, reflecting on a period of change and uncertainty, expressed hope for a leader who would be a genuine "partner with all" and who would take the time to develop authentic relationships with teachers, staff, and families rather than leading from a distance.

Collaborative Leader followed closely behind. Nearly every stakeholder group, from the Administrators' Union to Central Office leadership to certified staff, used some version of the word collaborative to describe the leadership style Rocky Hill needs next. Certified staff called explicitly for a "collaborative decision maker," using two exclamation points to emphasize the point, while the Board described a superintendent who "builds a true leadership team, values administrators' expertise, and involves them meaningfully in decisions that affect their schools and departments." This theme extended to central office and building level relationships as well, with multiple groups asking for a leader who distributes authority and trusts professionals to do their jobs rather than managing from the top down.

Instructional Leader ranked among the very highest priorities in the community survey data, tied for the single most frequently selected area of expertise across both surveys. Respondents want a superintendent with a genuine, demonstrated background in curriculum, instruction, and assessment, not simply administrative experience. The Board's profile calls for someone who "possesses a strong background in curriculum, instruction, assessment, and student achievement" and who "uses data to drive continuous improvement and support student success." Certified staff specifically cited the need to address "current changes in class size guidelines" and to modernize curriculum in areas such as middle school mathematics, while parents consistently linked academic rigor to their sense of pride in the district.

Community Builder was named with particular strength by town officials and by the Board of Education, both of which described the superintendent's relationship with Rocky Hill beyond the schoolhouse doors as essential to the district's success. Town officials sought a leader who is "communicative with the Town and other Boards" and who demonstrates "cognizance of the Town's demographics," while the Board described the need for a superintendent who is "visible and engaged" and who builds "collaborative and politically aware" partnerships with the Town Council, the Mayor, and community organizations. Several board members specifically emphasized attending community and school events as a visible signal of investment in the town.

Leader, in the sense of a visionary who sets clear direction and holds the organization to it, was named repeatedly as a distinct and necessary role. Being "a motivator with a clear and compelling vision for district success, an educational visionary" ranked among the top personal qualities identified across both community surveys. The Board's imperatives echoed this directly, calling for the new superintendent to "develop and communicate a clear district vision with measurable priorities and an implementation plan that is understood by all stakeholders" and to have "a clear board approved plan for the next three to five years."

Advocate emerged clearly from the Board's own feedback as an essential role, even where it was less explicitly named in community survey language. Board members described wanting a superintendent who "effectively represents the district's needs at the state level" and who serves as a "trustworthy advocate for Rocky Hill" by celebrating the schools' strengths while honestly acknowledging areas for improvement. This advocacy extends to budget season specifically, where board members want a leader who can "clearly articulate the district's budget needs" to the Town Council and Mayor's office.

Coach was named with particular emphasis by the Administrators' Union and Central Office staff, two groups closely attuned to how the next superintendent will develop and support the district's building level leaders. The Administrators' Union specifically asked for a leader with a "history of strong mentorship" who "corrects with support and guidance, not blame and punishment," while the Board's profile calls for a "supportive coach and mentor" who "invests in the professional growth of administrators through coaching, mentoring, and meaningful feedback."

Change Leader appeared consistently across the data, though nearly always paired with a caution about pace. Stakeholders want a leader capable of moving Rocky Hill forward, but not one who moves too quickly before understanding the district's history and culture. The Board's language captured this balance precisely, calling for a leader who "can move the district forward without creating change simply for the sake of change" and who "understands what is working, what needs improvement, and brings people along in the process."

Performance Manager, reflecting the Board's strong emphasis on accountability, rounds out the top tier of leadership roles. Board members repeatedly described wanting a superintendent who sets clear expectations, "holds administrators accountable for achieving district goals," and establishes "measurable district goals for academic achievement, school climate, and organizational effectiveness" with regular progress reporting to the Board and community.

Several additional roles from the research-based framework were present in the feedback at meaningful, though somewhat lower, levels of intensity. In descending order of emphasis, these include Motivator, Politician, Team Builder, Troubleshooter, Champion, Negotiator, Crisis Manager, Innovator, Conflict Manager, and Equity Leader, each of which surfaced in specific stakeholder comments even where it was not among the most dominant themes overall.

Key Leadership Competencies

Building Trust and Credibility emerged as the single most essential competency for Rocky Hill's next superintendent, named directly or indirectly by nearly every stakeholder group. Given the concerns about Central Office transparency described earlier in this report, this competency carries particular weight for Rocky Hill at this moment in its history. The Board's values statement placed "integrity and transparency" first among its priorities, describing a leader who "leads honestly, communicates openly, explains decisions, and follows through on commitments." Certified staff described trust that "must be rebuilt through actions, not just words," and Central Office leadership named "dishonesty" as the single clearest way the next superintendent could fail.

Communicating followed closely, appearing as both a leadership role and a distinct competency throughout the data. Stakeholders consistently distinguished between simply sharing information and communicating well, describing a need for messaging that is honest, timely, and tailored to the audience receiving it. The Board sought a leader who "clearly articulates the rationale behind recommendations and district initiatives" and "avoids surprises," while parents and staff alike wanted more frequent, direct updates, particularly during moments of change or uncertainty.

Professionalism, encompassing honesty, integrity, and ethical decision-making under all circumstances, was named explicitly and repeatedly by the Board of Education as a defining value. Individual board members listed "honesty," "integrity," "open-mindedness," and "accountability" among their top priorities for the role, and this competency surfaced again in nearly every focus group's list of potential derailers, where dishonesty, favoritism, and self-interested decision-making were named as unacceptable.

Relationship Building was described by stakeholders as the practical expression of trust, the day-to-day work of developing genuine, sustained connections with staff, families, and community members. The Board's profile for the district's relationship with families calls for a superintendent who is "accessible and approachable" and who "creates opportunities for families to engage directly with district leadership," while certified staff and Central Office staff both emphasized wanting a leader who is genuinely accessible, not simply present for ceremonial occasions.

Collaborative Leadership, the willingness to share decision-making authority and value the expertise of others, was cited across nearly every stakeholder group as central to rebuilding a sense of shared purpose in the district. The Board described wanting a leader who "builds a collaborative leadership culture among administrators that emphasizes shared decision-making, consistency, and support for schools," language that mirrors almost exactly what certified staff and the Administrators' Union asked for in their own focus group sessions.

Courage was the single highest rated personal quality in the combined survey data, reflecting a community that wants a leader willing to make difficult, sometimes unpopular decisions in service of what is right for students. The Board's language was direct on this point, describing the need for "humility, judgment, and courage" and a leader

who "has the courage to make difficult decisions when necessary." Central Office leadership named the absence of courage as one of only four things that would derail the next superintendent, and multiple survey respondents paired courage directly with integrity as their top priority for the role.

Emotional Maturity, the capacity to remain composed, authentic, and free of ego under pressure, surfaced repeatedly across the data, often in the language stakeholders used to describe what they did not want. The Administrators' Union specifically named "not warm or charismatic" as a potential derailer, while other groups described wanting a leader who demonstrates empathy, grace, and genuine care for the people affected by difficult decisions.

Culture and Climate Management emerged with particular urgency given the concerns certified staff raised about trust and morale within the district. Certified staff pointed to a recent staff climate survey, citing it as evidence that many teachers were reluctant to speak candidly with Central Office, a signal that the next superintendent will need to prioritize this competency early and visibly. The Board's own language reflects an awareness of this need, calling for "a strong organizational culture where teachers and staff feel valued, families feel informed, and difficult decisions are handled collaboratively and transparently."

Financial Acumen rounds out the top tier of leadership competencies, reflecting the Board's extensive and detailed expectations around budget development, capital planning, and fiscal stewardship. Board members want a superintendent who can "clearly connect budget requests to student needs, district goals, and measurable outcomes" while working productively with the Town Council and Mayor's office, and who understands the particular fiscal culture of a town that, in the words of one board member, values "doing more with less."

The remaining competencies in the research-based framework were each present in the stakeholder feedback as well, though at a lower level of intensity than the priorities described above. In descending order of emphasis, these include Community Building, Results Driven, Big Picture Orientation, Good Judgment, Leadership, Adaptability and Flexibility, Systems Thinking, Team Building, Political Savvy, Team Player, Accurate Empathy, and Values Diversity.

Experiences and Qualifications

Stakeholders expressed a clear preference for a candidate with broad, hands-on educational leadership experience rather than a purely administrative background. When asked directly which leadership experiences the next superintendent should bring to the role, respondents most frequently named experience as a school principal, followed closely by classroom teaching experience, prior experience as a superintendent, and central office administrative experience. The Board's own language reinforced this preference for breadth, describing an ideal candidate who has "experience serving in multiple educational roles, such as teacher, coach, department leader, principal, and central office administrator" and who "understands the day-to-day realities of classrooms, schools, and district operations."

Instructional expertise was named as a nonnegotiable qualification. Respondents want a leader with genuine command of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and several board members specifically called for a candidate with a "distinguished record of improving student performance" and demonstrated success using data within professional learning communities to guide instructional decisions. Experience with special education programming and multilingual learner services was named specifically by multiple stakeholder groups, reflecting the district's changing student population.

Financial and facilities experience was described as essential given the district's current budget environment and its aging infrastructure. The Board's profile calls for demonstrated experience "developing and managing complex public education budgets, making difficult resource decisions, and aligning spending with student and district priorities," along with familiarity with capital improvement planning and school construction processes.

On credentials, stakeholders, particularly Board members, expect the next superintendent to hold Connecticut's Superintendent Certification along with a master's degree in education, educational leadership, or a related field, with a doctorate viewed favorably though not required by most respondents. A small number of board members expressed a preference for candidates with prior central office or assistant superintendent

experience in a Connecticut public school district as an alternative or complement to a terminal degree.

Above all, stakeholders across every group returned to the same underlying expectation, articulated perhaps most simply by one certified staff member who wrote that the district needs "a leader that can see the strengths in the district and build on them, one who believes in collaboration and stakeholder input, with empathy, but a focus on research and data-based decision making."

Key Success Measures

Drawing directly on the Board of Education's detailed input, the following measures reflect what Rocky Hill's governing board will look for as evidence that the next superintendent is succeeding, organized across the first six, twelve, and eighteen months in the role.

First Six Months. The Board expects the new superintendent to prioritize listening, relationship building, and organizational learning over major new initiatives. Board members described this period as one for completing a genuine listening tour across the district and the town, establishing a working relationship with the Board itself, and beginning to rebuild trust with teachers and staff through visible, consistent engagement. Concrete measures named by the Board include reviewing the current budget and student achievement data in depth, getting to know the district's faculty, staff, and buildings by name and by visit, establishing transparent and regular communication with staff, families, and the Board, and demonstrating early, credible progress toward gaining the trust of the administration, the Town, and the school community.

First Twelve Months. The Board expects the superintendent to have translated early listening into a clear, actionable plan. Named success measures include a Board approved plan covering the district's direction for the next three to five years, a responsible and clearly explained budget that connects spending decisions to student and instructional priorities, initial progress on curriculum priorities such as updated middle school mathematics, and measurable improvement in staff morale and trust as reflected in staff feedback and engagement with union leadership. The Board also expects to see

the district's most pressing academic, staffing, and operational priorities identified and communicated clearly to the community.

First Eighteen Months. The Board expects sustained, visible evidence that the new leadership is taking hold across the district. This includes positive, productive working relationships between the superintendent, the Board, Town Council, and community leaders, measurable progress on academic achievement and student support goals, a stronger and more unified organizational culture in which staff feel valued and families feel informed, and continued fiscal discipline, including staying within an approved budget and maintaining the district's facilities and infrastructure. Several board members specifically noted that favorable engagement from faculty, staff, and administrators, along with visible community pride in the district's direction, would be meaningful markers of success at this stage.

Potential Derailers

Drawing on the focus group feedback gathered from parents, town officials, the Administrators' Union, Central Office leadership, Central Office staff, certified staff, and non-certified staff, three specific and recurring themes emerged describing what would derail Rocky Hill's next superintendent.

Communication failure and exclusion from decisions. Across nearly every focus group, participants pointed to some version of not communicating, not developing relationships, not maintaining an open-door policy, not being a team player, and not involving others or making sure they feel heard before decisions are made. Town officials specifically warned against a superintendent who is not communicative with the Town, parents cautioned against a leader who does not listen to teachers or the broader community, and other stakeholders warned that listening without truly acting on what is heard would be just as damaging as not listening at all.

Erosion of trust through dishonesty or self-interest. Focus group participants named dishonesty, a lack of courage, being demeaning, mean, or lacking in warmth, favoring personal or political interests over what is right for students, pursuing the role purely for career advancement, and avoiding genuine relationships with staff as behaviors that would quickly undermine confidence in the next superintendent. Parents added that

a lack of professionalism or level-headedness would be equally damaging. Central Office staff specifically cautioned against a leader who is more concerned with looking good than doing right by staff and students, certified staff cautioned against a superintendent who mismanages the handling of teacher discipline matters, and other stakeholders cautioned against a leader who is physically present without being genuinely engaged or helpful.

Acting before understanding Rocky Hill. Whether by making changes too quickly, managing too tightly, or failing to learn the district's history, culture, and systems before attempting to lead them, this was named repeatedly as a serious risk. Parents cautioned against a leader who does not take the time to learn about the district before making changes or who fails to recognize the community's diverse culture, and town officials warned against a superintendent who is controlling or uncooperative with the Town, does not learn the Town and its systems, fails to understand local political dynamics, or disregards established community priorities such as school safety. Central Office leadership specifically cautioned against micromanagement, describing the ideal instead as a leader who serves as "a mentor and guide and sounding board" while allowing professionals to use their own judgment and skill, and Central Office staff added that consistent, visible participation in community and school events reflects this same genuine investment in Rocky Hill.

Conclusion

The search for Rocky Hill's next superintendent arrives at a genuinely important moment in the district's history. Stakeholders across every group, from students to town officials to the Board of Education itself, described a district with real strengths to build upon: dedicated and talented teachers, strong academic outcomes, an engaged and proud community, and a track record of growth even other Connecticut districts have not matched. At the same time, stakeholders were candid, and appropriately so, about the work ahead, particularly the need to rebuild trust between Central Office and the rest of the district, to manage a constrained budget and aging facilities responsibly, and to communicate clearly and consistently with a community that clearly cares about its schools.

The leadership profile that emerges from this process calls for a superintendent who leads first with communication, integrity, and genuine relationship building, who brings real instructional expertise and a track record of improving student outcomes, and who has the courage to make difficult decisions thoughtfully while bringing the community along. Above all, Rocky Hill's stakeholders are asking for a leader who will take the time to know the district before changing it, who will treat every group, from Central Office to the classroom to the Town Council, as a genuine partner, and who will keep students at the center of every decision made along the way.

The Rocky Hill Board of Education is well-positioned to use this profile, together with its own considerable investment of time and insight throughout this process, to identify and select a superintendent who can unite the community, restore trust across the organization, and lead Rocky Hill Public Schools into its next chapter of success.